

Scrooge tale gets a new twist

By GENE GREY

Christmas would not be Christmas without the saintly character transformation of that tight-fisted, hum-bugging curmudgeon Ebenezer Scrooge.

The Cider Mill Playhouse is staging a new adaptation of the Charles Dickens' Yuletide classic, *A Christmas Carol*, now through Dec. 30.

The Cider Mill version is innovative, yet adheres closely to Dickens' book.

The major innovation, aside from some incidental music, is that the two-act show opens with the actors visiting a sick child who is unable to attend that evening's performance of *A Christmas Carol*, so they decide to do the entire show right there in her bedroom, using whatever props and costumes they can find.

That serves to introduce the cast and makes the transformation from actors to characters a novel sight for the audience.

John Bielenberg makes an excellent Scrooge. Stooped over his counting table, cursing those poor fools who would find something to be merry about in a cruel and pitiless world, Bielenberg is as unpleasant a Scrooge as you're likely to meet. And when he finally sees the light, through the courtesy of three Yuletide spirits, he presents a comic picture of a man joyfully and giddily skipping through the joys of Christmas.

For this special production, the Cider Mill, a project of the Department of Theater of the State University of New York at Binghamton, has gathered some of the finest performers in the area. They all in double, and sometimes triple, roles.

Bill Gorman is both the poor but good-natured Bob Crachet and the first spirit to confront Scrooge, the ghost of Christmas past.

Claus Evans is a walking Christmas tree and the ghost of Christmas present.

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Other roles are performed by Carol Hanscom, Tom Kremer, Bruce Bell, Melinda Lawrence, Bernie Sheredy and Adriana Warner.

The cute Andrea Corner plays both the ill little girl and Tiny Tim, who has the famous curtain line: "God bless you, everyone."

The amusing special effects and lighting are by John Eloy Vestal.

Susan J. Peters provided the musical accompaniment, much of which is original material.

The first act may be a tad long and it's too bad there isn't a sprightly song to quicken the pace, as there is in the second act, but once the audience adjusts to the cadences of Victorian English — it is, after all, Dickens — the production is a thoroughly entertaining enterprise.

There is no director listed because the cast worked so closely in adapting and honing the work.

The play may be somewhat lengthy for very young children, but the many school-age children in the opening night's audience appeared to be having a very good time, as were their parents.

A Christmas Carol is sold out through Dec. 25, but there are tickets available for the Dec. 26 matinee (at 3 p.m.) and the Dec. 26 through 30 evening (8:15) performances. The Cider Mill Playhouse is at 2 South Nanticoke Ave., Endicott. Tickets may be reserved Monday through Friday from noon to 4:30 p.m. at 798-4456 or from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. at 748-7363.

This production, lovingly and expertly done, could even make the Grinch love Christmas.